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Peace Corps Recruiting Aim Changes To Fresh Territory

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Peace Corps recruiters will be seen in fresh territory this summer and fall. They'll be out in force at county and state fairs, among other market places, hoping to convince farmers, plumbers, carpenters, electricians and other artisans to volunteer their skills for two years overseas.

This is the "new directions" Peace Corps which, as it starts its 10th year of operation this month, is aiming at a professionally-managed, skill-oriented corps—one less tied to idealistic liberal arts students and young people with more enthusiasm than specific ability.

The new recruiting effort is based on experience, some of it bad. Some of the idealists of earlier years have in fact turned against the Peace Corps, leveling bitter criticism against the organization; there are those among the "disillusioned"—as they claim to be—even demanding its abolition.

The new turn in Peace Corps' philosophy and the disillusionment of some of its former Corpsmen are both a reflection of the Sixties into which John F. Kennedy launched the first group of 12 volunteers to help in the slums and villages of Colombia.

Since that spring of 1961 there have been three political assassinations, the Vietnam War, the full tide of civil rights demonstrations, the black power movement, riots in most major U.S. cities, and the rise of militant student radicals, for whom the term "revolution" now seems to be the only answer to world problems.

Despite its goldfish-bowl existence, the Peace Corps has managed to survive most criticism in its first nine years. In 1967 nearly 15,000 volunteers were working in 66 countries. Today this has dropped to about 9,500 volunteers in 58 countries, with a request for more skilled workers.

Responding to the new demands of host nations, Peace

Corps Director Joseph H. Blatchford, at 35 the youngest agency chief in the Nixon administration, is "professionalizing" the organization's bureaucracy and changing its recruiting emphasis from big university campuses to middle America.

"We're going after the hard-nosed business managers to run this thing," a Peace Corps spokesman explained. "For a long time the Peace Corps has hired returned volunteers to administer the program. Well, it's not working out. We're finding the volunteers might be good in the field, but not necessarily in administration."

"What we have in mind is recruiting businessmen, get them to take a leave or a sabbatical for a couple of years, and become a country director, for instance. Or work in our Washington office. We're after efficiency."

"As for the volunteers, we're after the people in middle America, not those on the Eastern campuses—Harvard, Radcliffe, Yale and the like. We're pressing the agricultural schools in Iowa, the Dakotas and the schools in the South for volunteers. We're also getting off the campus and working closely with the unions through the AFL-CIO."

The Corps also has eased its requirements to allow families to qualify for the first time.

Six families now training in lower California will be ready to leave for Bolivia in May. Another 200 families are training for other assignments in Spanish-speaking countries beginning in the fall.

"We'll even be setting up booths at the county fairs and state fairs," the spokesman said. "This is where the volunteers we need are at."

But one hitch in these "New Directions, 1970," is that middle Americans are less likely to volunteer than idealistic college students.

"We've got requests for 800 agriculturalists and we honestly don't know where we're going to get them," a Corpsman said in Washington.

Most returned volunteers and others close to the Peace Corps agree with the "New Directions." They point to a Harris poll of returned volunteers completed in December, 1969, in which the majority felt the skilled workers, conduct more specialized training and aim for more "host country involvement" in the programs.

On the other hand, there is increasing criticism of the Peace Corps itself that ranges from radical to moderate.

The most active opponents of the Peace Corps belong to the small, but highly vocal, Committee of Returned Volunteers (CRV), a three-year-old organization which claims a membership of about 2,000. CRV's position paper states that revolution is the only way to carry out "an equitable redis-

tribution of economic and political power."

CRV also accuses the Peace Corps of supporting the status quo in nations run by dictators, of passing information about local political opposition leaders to U.S. embassies and the CIA, and, in general, attempting to "Americanize" host countries.